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Defining and classifying ecosystem services for decision making

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Abstract

The concept of ecosystems services has become an important model for linking the functioning of ecosystems to human welfare. Understanding this link is critical for a wide-range of decision-making contexts. While there have been several attempts to come up with a classification scheme for ecosystem services, there has not been an agreed upon, meaningful and consistent definition for ecosystem services. In this paper we offer a definition of ecosystem services that is likely to be operational for ecosystem service research and several classification schemes. We argue that any attempt at classifying ecosystem services should be based on both the characteristics of the ecosystems of interest and a decision context for which the concept of ecosystem services is being mobilized. Because of this there is not one classification scheme that will be adequate for the many contexts in which ecosystem service research may be utilized. We discuss several examples of how classification schemes will be a function of both ecosystem and ecosystem service characteristics and the decision-making context.

Keywords

Ecosystem services; Ecosystem benefits; Human welfare; Environmental decision making; Millennium Assessment



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